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SUBJECT: ASSISTING AFGHANS WITH CULTURAL RESTORATION AND REVIVING HISTORIC CRAFTS

¶1. Summary: Embassy met a key benchmark in support for Turquoise Mountain Trust (TMT) with the February 16 graduation of 30 students from a three-year program sponsored by the Turquoise Mountain Institute for Afghan Arts and Architecture, the premier institution of its kind in the country. The event marked an important milestone in our efforts to assist Afghanistan to regenerate its traditional crafts and generate sustainable growth in this sector. End Summary.

¶2. On February 16, the first class of 30 male and female Afghan students from the Schools of Woodwork, Ceramics, and Calligraphy & Painting graduated from the three-year course at the Turquoise Mountain Institute for Afghan Arts and Architecture. The event, attended by USAID Mission Director and held at Kabul's Moghul-era Bagh-e Babur gardens, highlighted Afghanistan's cultural and historical heritage, emphasized the gains that have been made in reviving this heritage, and instilled a sense of hope by recognizing the efforts and promising futures of the young graduates. The TMT program goals are to train designers, craftsmen and entrepreneurs, promote creativity and establish the foundation for a broader cultural revival.

Restoring Historic Kabul

¶3. Afghanistan was once world-renowned for its arts, crafts and architecture and Turquoise Mountain was the greatest Afghan capital of the Middle Ages. For Afghans, the name still evokes the country's glorious cultural heritage. Established in 2006 by former British diplomat Rory Stewart, Turquoise Mountain Trust has in its short life made major strides in reviving Afghanistan's crafts traditions after three decades of conflict. The Trust's high-end projects have successfully recruited the support of senior Afghan and international patrons such as President Karzai and the Prince of Wales.

¶4. USAID financial support for TMT began in November 2008 began with the economic, social and cultural regeneration of Murad Khane, a commercial/residential precinct in Kabul's Old City Center. Turquoise Mountain and the local community cleared more than 12,000 cubic meters of garbage, repaired over 50 houses, installed 330 meters of drainage, reconstructed eight shops, and paved the area for the first time. TMT is also completing restoration of four buildings of architectural or cultural significance, establishing Murad Khane as an anchor of Kabul's historic areas and galvanizing further development through its restored historic quarter, active art and crafts schools, and marketing of Afghan products to domestic and international markets.

Strengthening Ancient Crafts

¶5. A recent increase in USG support is enabling the Trust to establish the Institute of Afghan Arts and Architecture in Murad Khane and ensure its sustainability. Already the premier training centre for traditional arts in Afghanistan, the institute offers high quality vocational education programs to artisans in Woodwork,

Calligraphy and Painting, Jewelry and Gem-cutting, and Ceramics. By 2015, TMT aims to meet the total costs of the Institute through a combination of revenue from crafts sales and private philanthropic contributions.

Opportunities for Afghans

¶ 6. Under the current agreement with USAID, the Institute will provide technical vocational crafts training and complementary skills (business, Dari literacy, English, design, regional art history and IT) to a total of 200 students over a 5-year period. Turquoise Mountain is also establishing a Graduate Opportunities Program to provide wide-ranging assistance to its graduates as they secure employment and/or study further in Afghanistan and abroad. While reviewing a display of the Institute's products and speaking with recent graduates, the USAID Director noted the enthusiasm of the students and the fact that the vast majority of graduates have already secured employment or continuing education positions. Some of the graduates will be placed in Turquoise Mountain Design & Production Studio. The Institute is becoming a source of income, skills and pride for Afghan women and men.

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Clearance page: CULTURAL RESTORATION: STUDENTS HELP REVIVE HISTORIC CRAFTS

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